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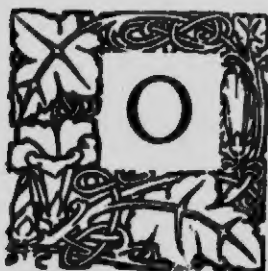
QUEBEC'S TERCENTENARY



Byron Nicholson

Quebec's Tercentenary

BYRON NICHOLSON



OF the many illustrious noblemen whom England has sent us as Governors since 1867, the year in which the confederation of our then more important provinces was consummated, not one has shown greater interest in the welfare of our country than Lord Grey, who now so worthily represents His Gracious Majesty King Edward VII in this Dominion; and perhaps he has given us no more striking manifestation of that interest than the leading part he has so gracefully taken in promoting the recent celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the

foundings of Quebec,—a celebration which will undoubtedly help to adorn the pages of Canada's history, and will be read with feelings of pride and patriotism by our descendants and others in the distant future.

Moreover, His Excellency has, in this matter, furnished another example of the practical character of the great influence which he wields so wisely, for he suggested the propriety and desirability of marking the celebration by setting apart, as a national park, certain historic sites in the neighborhood of the Ancient Capital — thus rescuing them from their neglected and almost disgraceful condition, and converting them into a scene "of beauty" which will remain "a joy forever."

No wonder is it that the people of Canada took up His Excellency's felicitous suggestion with all their wonted enthusiasm: for, no matter to which of the numerous nationalities represented in our present cosmopolitan population any of us may belong, we are not only reaping benefits to-day from the heroic achieve-

ments of Champlain and other brave men from Old France, but also many of those nationalities were represented on the battlegrounds where and when those mighty deeds were done which have rendered famous the places where they were accomplished, and which can never be forgotten. How could we possibly have failed to enter heartily in to this celebration — we who are now enjoying the invaluable privileges and advantages of that wondrous transformation which took place in Canada between the years 1608 and 1759, and which has been going on ever since with a higher intensity and a greater rapidity because of the many useful inventions and discoveries of the nineteenth century? The force of the last statement is made potent by the repetition of three words, viz., chemistry, steam, electricity.

What time more propitious than the present for such a celebration could possibly have been imagined? The old feud between France and England had been long forgotten; it came to a perpetual end more than half a century ago, when

the two countries became allies for the protection of Turkey against the encroachments of Russia. The genuine character of the *entente cordiale* between them is evidenced by the whole-hearted reception not long since given to the King of England in the French capital, and by the reception given to the President of the French Republic in the English capital, by the courtesy and hospitality shown to British statesmen in France and to French statesmen in Britain, by the lavish entertainment of municipal officers from the United Kingdom when visiting the Republic, and by the corresponding entertainment of municipal officers from the Republic when visiting the United Kingdom ; and — by no means the least significant — by the hearty and fraternal welcome accorded to the members of the influential British Fourth Estate by their brethren in France, and to French journalists by those in England. As we remember, squadrons from the fleets of both nations took part in the tercentenary celebration, and the Heir to the British Throne was present. What seer, a hun-

dred years ago, who would have dared to foretell that events of such happy omen would mark the first decade of the twentieth century?

But in the midst of all our joyous congratulations of each other and — as we hope — our thankfulness to Providence, because of the wonderful progress of our country in all those pursuits which go towards making a commonwealth really great and prosperous, let us not forget any of those great men to whom we are indebted for our present prominent position amongst earth's many nations. Are not some of us too apt to believe that Canada owes that position, chiefly if not entirely, to the political sagacity and business ability of those who have swayed her destinies since she became a British possession, and that she is but little indebted to the men by whom she was ruled up to the year of grace 1759?

Now, without denying to those by whom her course has been directed for the last century and a half or so — great men, many of them, men of transcendent ability in statesmanship and all that it

implies, men of unflagging energy and industry in trade and commerce, men of indomitable perseverance and fortitude in the face of the countless hardships they had to endure while pushing on towards the West as the pioneers of agriculture, converting a wilderness into a "very garden of the Lord", men of wonderful genius in mechanical inventions for the removal of those hardships and for other purposes equally desirable — without denying to those men one particle of the honor, the great honor, to which they are justly entitled — is it not morally certain that our country would have no such solid prosperity as she enjoys to-day, no such well-grounded hope as she has of a still more prosperous future, had it not been for the noble self-sacrifice, and the heroic deeds, and the almost superhuman achievements of other great men who knew and loved the land for generations before the youthful commander, James Wolfe, ever crossed the Atlantic.

Surely to those men Canada owes a debt — a debt which can be no more repaid that it can be forgotten. We are

reminded of it by the very names of almost every island and lake, every cape and bay, every mountain that rises and every stream that flows in those portions of the country which were first settled by the sons and daughters of the Land of the Gaul !

And surely this debt is kept fresh in our memory by the language mostly spoken in the old Province of Quebec — the language of romance and chivalry, and not the less the language of science and literature, the language spoken by Cartier and Champlain in their vessels on the storm-tossed ocean, in the first rude dwellings which they built on our then uncultured shores ; the language which is the vernacular of many of the most eloquent of that brilliant assembly of legislators who meet in the beautiful and imposing group of buildings which adorn Parliament Hill in the picturesque capital of our broad Dominion.

Ah ! the men that spent themselves, sacrificing even life itself, in working for Canada's progress up to 1757, determined that the land, in spite of the difficulties

almost innumerable and of discouragements so disheartening that less brave men would have laid down their work in despair, should be "great, glorious and free"; and so they made the Christian Faith the very foundation of all their institutions, whether educational, political, or industrial; for long before Pollok's *Course of Time* was written, they had learned that:

" True Liberty was Christian, sanctified,
Baptized, and found in Christian hearts alone;
Companion of Religion, where she came, there
[Freedom dwelt,
Ruled where she ruled, expired where she
[expired.

As might be expected, the characteristic which most indelibly marks the work of their lives is success in almost all their undertakings; seldom did failure attend their efforts. Animated by most worthy motives, free from even the taint of a base selfishness, scorning ease and luxury, leaving behind them almost the commonest comforts of civilized life, spurning what is commonly known as wealth — the

god of this plutocratic age—they performed the most arduous labors, and indescribable sufferings and overcame seemingly insuperable obstacles, as they went on towards the accomplishment of their Heaven-sent task of civilizing a barbarous continent and Christianising its heathen inhabitants. Self was laid aside, and perhaps the glory of their idolized France was more than half forgotten, in their devotion to the Christ-like work of ameliorating the physical life of the pagan Indians, of awakening their dormant mental faculties, and of bringing tribe after tribe to the Foot of the Cross. No one would so much as dream of denying their success in converting to Christianity those whom they sought to evangelize ; and equally plain is it that another result of their stupendous labors was the literal fulfilment, by anticipation, of Campbell's prophetic lines :

On Erie's banks where tigers steal along,
And the dread Indian chants a dismal song,
Where human fiends on midnight errands walk,
And bathe in brains the murderous tomahawk,

There shall the flocks on thymy pastures stray,
And shepherds dance at summer's opening day ;
Each wandering genius of the lonely glen,
Shall start to view the glittering haunts of men,
And silent watch, on woodland heights around,
The village curfew as it tolls profound.

The men whom we are speaking of recognized a wider fraternity than that of their fellow-countrymen, even the Brotherhood of Humanity ; and an infinitely more glorious and loving Fatherhood than that of the French monarch, even the Paternity of God, and, although they may not have been conscious of it at the time, it was for the welfare of this greater Brotherhood that they gladly and patiently went on with the task to which they believed themselves called, namely, the advancement of the race in all those virtues which enter into the formation of that supreme good which is the highest attainment possible to man during his life on earth, even universal Cristian philanthropy.

The memory of many a noble Frenchman, and of many a Frenchwoman, too, who came to Canada in those early days,

is quite as worthy of being honored as that of Champlain, and their names — names that will live, while lives the muse of history — might well be mentioned here; but as the year of our Lord, 1908, was the three hundredth anniversary of the Birth of Canada — for what less than this was the founding of Quebec? — the name of the founder of that city naturally took precedence of all others. Just here it may not be inappropriate to note that the descendants of people who came with him from the stately towns and the pleasant vineyards of La Belle France, and the descendants of some of those brave soldiers who met in mortal combat about a century and a half later, united and vied with each other in doing honor to Champlain's memory. Is this surprising? No, but it would have been surprising had it been otherwise; for Samuel Champlain, while still little more than a youth, won distinction in both the navy and the army of his native land; and honorably and bravely did he perform the difficult and onerous duties of his important and responsible station in the

New World; and, though in the discharge of those duties he had to adapt himself to unexpected, hazardous and ever varying conditions of life, he was successful — brilliantly successful — and that, too, in the face of most depressing discouragements, in spite of the most exhausting bodily hardships and notwithstanding a somewhat prolonged exposure to a disease which showed its malignant and mortal character by carrying off one after another of his companions. Time and again did he give evidence of his high appreciation of truth and justice, of his delicate sense of honor, of his devotion to the Christian religion, and of his inflexible determination to lead the life of a Christian gentleman. Yes, the people of Canada have given ample evidence of their delight in honoring the memory of this man — a hero worthy of France in her palmyest days, whose life can never pass into oblivion, and who will be remembered with esteem and affection so long as the waters of the mighty St. Lawrence roll their majestic tide past the battlements of the now his-

toric city which claims him as its founder.

Now amidst all our satisfaction and gratification at the success of the Tercentenary celebration, we who are not of French extraction, and especially if we are of the Anglo-Saxon race, cannot but admire the true patriotic feeling which animated our French-Canadian fellow-citizens in entering so heartily as they did into the movement in question, for, incidental to the celebration in memory of a work done for us by one of the bravest sons of France, there was as already implied, the setting apart of certain sites to form a national park, and if on one of these sites the flag of Britain succumbed to the Lilies of France, another of them is the field where hero fought with hero on the memorable fifteenth of September, 1759.

From a long and somewhat intimate acquaintance with French-Canadians, many of whom the writer is proud to have upon his "list of friends", he has not the slightest hesitation in saying that no people would be farther from claiming a

victory, where victory had not been won or from refusing to acknowledge a defeat where a defeat had been sustained. Therefore, he hopes he will not be misunderstood when he asks if Montcalm was really vanquished on the Plains of Abraham. Defeated, certainly, but was he vanquished? Is there not a sense in which he may really have been the victor? Perhaps no one can say with anything approaching certainty; but the question arose in my mind a few days ago when musing on a brief poem, from which the following are a couple of extracts:—

“ I sing the hymn of the conquered who fell
in the battle of life,

The hymn of the wounded, the beaten who
died overwhelmed in the strife;

Not the jubilant songs of the victors, for
whom the resounding acclaim

Of nations was lifted in chorus, whose brows
wore the chaplet of fame;

But the hymn of the low and the humble,
the weary, the broken in heart,

Who strove and who failed, acting bravely,
a silent and desperate part.

Speak, History : — Who are life's victors ?

Unroll thy long annals, and say :

Are they those whom the world calls the
victors, who won the success of a day ?

The martyrs or Nero ? The Spartans who
fell at Thermopylae's tryst,

Or the Persians and Xerxes ? His judges
or Socrates ? Pilate or Christ ?

At any rate, whatever our opinion of the contest between Wolfe and Montcalm, we cannot but admire the attitude of the French-Canadian people towards the recent celebration ; for they, by entering into the movement with characteristic enthusiasm, have shown how they can subjugate a very natural feeling of chagrin — even if not resentment — to the higher feeling of interest in the country's reputation for gratitude towards her benefactors of former days, how chivalrously they can consign all past racial enmity to the tomb of forgetfulness, and how gladly they do what they can for the promotion of any undertaking which is designed to reflect honor, directly or indirectly upon their beloved Canada.

All of them, to-day, from our gifted and accomplished Premier — who convinces by his logic, delights with his rhetoric, and persuades by his eloquence — down to the humblest habitant who "rears his lone cottage in the silent dale", have amply proved by their cordial support of the movement so felicitously set afoot by His Excellency the Governor-General, that they are ready, at every suitable opportunity, to carry out the knightly motto of their gallant race, *Noblesse oblige*.

Ottawa, 1910.



